

JACK O'JUDGMENT

By Edgar Wallace

An Unusual Story of a Blackmailing Gang and a Mysterious Avenger, by the Author of "Green Rust," "The Daffodil Murder," "Clue of the Twisted Candle"

THE STORY SO FAR
COLONEL DAN BOUNDARY, fat, coarse-grained, but unusually clever and resourceful, was once a boy who, after being warned off receipt of a loan of clubs, signed "Jack o' Judgment" after several threats. He had been induced to do this to enrich him without risking the law's penalties. He tries to disown his signature, running around like a cobbler.

STRAFFORD KING, of the London Crime Club, is present.

PINTO SILVA, stock man about town, forces his attention on an actress who rebels him. She is **MARIE WHITE**, daughter of Sam White, one of Boundary's best friends. She is interested in **Boundary**.

LOLLIE MARSH, a drowsy old dame, wants to buy "camp" of the blackmailing gang.

CROOK CREWE, once a gentleman, now thief.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

CHAPTER VII

The Colonel Conducts His Business

A MERRY little dinner party was assembled that night in a luxurious apartment in Albermarle House. It was the colonel, independent and dressed in three-piece suit, and consisted of three—the colonel, independent and dressed. **Swell Crewe** and a middle-aged man whose antique dress coat and name too spotless linen certainly did not advertise their owner's prosperity. Yet this man with the stubby mustache and the bald head could write his check for seven figures, being Mr. Thomas Croton, of the firm of Croton & Pringle, whose walls stills occupied a respectable corner in Bond and Dover.

"You're Colonel Boundary, sir?" he said admiringly, and for about the seventh time since the meal started.

The colonel nodded with a good-humored twinkle in his eye.

"Well, fancy that!" said Mr. Croton. "I'll have something to talk about when I go back to Yorkshire." It is lucky I met your friend, Captain Crewe, at our club, Huddersfield."

The colonel smiled again and lifted a bottle toward the other.

"No, no," said the spinner. "I'll have no more. I know when I've had enough."

The colonel replaced the bottle by his side.

"So you read of the trial, did you?"

"I did," said the other, "and I said to my missus: 'You's a clever fellow. I'd like to meet him.'"

"You have an admiration for the criminal class, eh?" said the colonel good-humoredly.

"Yes, I am. I'm not saying you're a criminal," said the other, "but I take an interest in those cases. You never know what you can learn."

"And what did your lady wife say?" asked Boundary.

The Yorkshirereman smiled broadly.

"Well, she doesn't take any interest in these things. She's a real London lady, here we're in a high position when I married."

"Five years ago," said Boundary, "you married the daughter of Lord Westovern. It cost you a hundred thousand pounds to pay the old man's debts."

The Yorkshirereman stared at him.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"You're nominated for Parliament, too, aren't you?" And he used to be master of Little Thistlebottom."

Mr. Croton laughed uproariously.

"Well, you've got me properly placed," he said admiringly, and the colonel agreed with a gesture.

"So you're interested in the criminal classes?"

Mr. Croton waved a hand protestingly.

"I'm not saying you're a member of the criminal classes, colonel," he said.

"My friend Crewe here wouldn't think I would be so rude. Of course I know the charge was all wrong."

"That's where you're mistaken," interrupted the colonel calmly; "it was all right."

"It was not."

"The charge was perfectly sound," said the colonel, playing with his fruit-knife.

"For twenty years I have been making money by buying businesses at about a twentieth of their value and selling them again."

"But how?" began the other.

"Wait; I'll tell you. I've got men working for me all over the country."

"The sub-contractors who are constantly on the lookout for scandalous keepers, servants, waiters—you know that sort of people who get hold of information."

Mr. Croton was speechless.

"Sooner or later I find a very incriminating fact which concerns a gentleman of property. I prefer those scoundrels which verge on the criminal," the colonel went on.

The outraged Mr. Croton was rolling his services.

"Where are you going? What are you going to do? That's young," said the colonel innocently.

"I'm going," said Mr. Croton, very red of face, "that's a joke, and when friend Crewe introduced me to you, he hadn't any idea that you were that kind of man." You see, he added, "I'm going to sit in your society with my high connections—after what you've said."

"Why not?" asked the colonel.

"After all, business is business, and I'm making an offer to join for the Riverborne Mill."

"The Riverborne Mill?" interrupted the spinner. "Ah, that's a joke of yours. You'll buy no Riverborne Mill from me."

"On the contrary, I shall buy the Riverborne Mill from you. In fact, I have all the papers and transfers ready for you to sign."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said the man grimly. "And what might you be offering me for the Riverborne?"

"I'm offering you thirty thousand pounds cash, plus a hundred and his horse—a thousand pounds cash," he said with a smile. "Why man, that property is worth two hundred thousand pounds."

"I thought it was worth a little more," said the colonel carelessly.

"You're a fool or a madman," said the angry Yorkshirereman. "It isn't my mill; it is a limited company."

"But you had the majority of the shares—ninetysix percent, I think," said the colonel. "These are the shares that you will bring to me at the which you suggest."

"I'll see you dead first," declared Croton, bringing his hand down smash the table.

"Sit down again for one moment."

"The colonel's voice was gentle but instant. "Do you know Maggie Delane?"

"Maggie Delane?"

Suddenly Croton's face went white.

"She was one of your father's mill girls when you were little more than a boy," the colonel proceeded, "and we were rather in love with her, and Easter you went away together to Blackpool. Do you remember?"

Croton did not speak.

"You married the young lady and the marriage was kept secret because you were afraid of your father, and as the years went on and the girl was the same old home girl had



"Jack o' Judgment! Poor old Jack o' Judgment come to make a call," chuckled the voice.

"Made for her, there seemed to be no need to admit your marriage, especially as there were no children. Then you began to take part in local politics and to accumulate ambitions. You dared not divorce your wife, and you thought there was no necessity for it. You had a chance of improving yourself socially by marrying the daughter of an English lord, and you jumped at it."

The man found his voice.

"Now you've got to prove that," he said huskily.

"I can prove it all right. Oh, no, your wife hasn't betrayed you, your real wife, I mean. You've betrayed yourself by insisting on paying her by telegraphic money orders. We heard of these mysterious payments, but suspected nothing beyond a vulgar love affair. Then one night, while your plain and compliant wife was in a theatre, one of my people searched her pockets and came into the marriage certificate. Would you like to see it?" said Croton thickly.

"No, no," said the spinner. "I'll have no more. I know when I've had enough."

"That is how you did it," said the colonel.

"I believe in being frank with people like you. Here are the transfers. You see the place for your signature marked with a pencil."

Suddenly Croton leaped at him in a blind fury, but the colonel gripped him by the throat with a hand like a steel vice, and shook him as a dog would shake a rat. And the gentle tone in his voice changed as quickly.

"I'm going to jail for this," said Croton thickly.

"You're a criminal, and the other is host literally—but I take an interest in these cases. You never know what you can learn."

"And what did your lady wife say?" asked Boundary.

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